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C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000236

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/30/2018  
TAGS: [AMGT](#) [BO](#) [CMGT](#) [OFDP](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)  
SUBJECT: BELARUS DEMANDS EMBASSY CUT STAFF TO FIVE

REF: A. STATE 32535  
[1](#)B. MINSK 215 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (C) As expected (refs A, B), Belarusian A/S-equivalent MFA Americas Department Director Vadim Lazerko presented Charge with a diplomatic note announcing that Belarus would reduce its diplomatic presence in Washington and New York to six (Ambassador plus five), and demanding that the U.S. reduce its diplomatic presence in Minsk to the same level by April 7, at 3:00 p.m. In the event the Embassy did not confirm reduction of staff to the same level by April 7, Lazerko warned that the MFA would reduce U.S. staff to five by declaring excess American diplomats "persona non grata." As in previous discussions, Lazerko claimed that this move was in accordance with Article 11 of the Vienna Convention and was the direct result of the failure of the USG to make progress in reducing economic sanctions against Belarus.

[1](#)2. (C) Charge told Lazerko that he would convey the contents of these notes to Washington and would await instructions. Charge noted that the Belarusian demands were cause for grave concern and warned that there would be consequences: the Belarusian authorities were making a big mistake by demanding additional staff cuts. Charge also protested the harassment that departing Embassy personnel had faced from state media and the KGB at Minsk International Airport, noting that Belarusian diplomats would not face such intrusions into their privacy upon their departure from the U.S.

Lazerko Passes Notes on Restrictions, Complaints  
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[1](#)3. (C) In addition to the note on staff cuts, Lazerko presented Charge with two additional diplomatic notes. The first outlined the procedures required for U.S. diplomats to request meetings with state bodies or to inform the MFA on travel outside of Minsk. According to these procedures, meetings must be requested no fewer than ten business days in advance and all travel further than 40 km outside the center of Minsk must be reported to the MFA 24 hours in advance with all travel details included. The second note contained a formal complaint about the contents of a March 27 interview Ambassador Stewart gave to European Radio for Belarus. Lazerko called Ambassador's remarks a defamation of the head of state and unacceptable. (Note: Post will transmit copies of all three diplomatic notes and Embassy translations of same to the Department. End note.)

[1](#)4. (C) In response to these points, the Charge defended the remarks made by Ambassador Stewart in her interview and

underscored that she remains post's Chief of Mission. Furthermore, he told Lazerko that Washington would impose reciprocal limits on the travel of Belarusian diplomats in the U.S.

Comment

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15. (C) These demands came as no surprise, as the Charge had been briefed about the demands in advance by Presidential Administration Foreign Policy Advisor Valentin Rybakov (ref B).

The fact that Lazerko asked for consideration for a Belarusian diplomat in Washington whose wife had recently been operated on leads us to believe that the GOB may indeed attempt to operate in Washington and New York with just five diplomats, at least for a time.

MOORE